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SUBJECT: TAMIL NADU: NO POPULAR SUPPORT FOR SRI LANKAN
TERRORISTS; REFUGEE FLOW CONTINUES

REF: A) CHENNAI 0062, B) CHENNAI 0898

1. (SBU) SUMMARY: The Tamil Nadu Government (GoTN) and the state's political parties across the board continue to voice sympathy for the Tamils of Sri Lanka but there is little evidence of a groundswell of support in Tamil Nadu for the LTTE or other militant groups. In a recent meeting with Consul General Hopper, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M. Karunanidhi said his government will balance India's needs for security with humanitarian concerns for Sri Lankan Tamils while also dealing with the refugees. Regarding possible Indian or international roles in the matter, or suggestions for a solution to the crisis, Karunanidhi was content to defer to the Government of India. Meanwhile, 4,540 Sri Lankan Tamil refugees have arrived in Tamil Nadu since January 2006, bringing the total number of Sri Lankan refugees in Tamil Nadu camps to over 55,000. END SUMMARY

SRI LANKAN SHADOWS OVER TAMIL NADU POLITICS?

2. (SBU) The worsening security situation in Sri Lanka and the resumed flow of refugees from the island have brought the Sri Lankan Tamil issue back to the headlines in Tamil Nadu. Statements by various political parties, news reports on the pathetic state of housing in the refugee camps, a fact-finding mission of state ministers to the camps, and news reports about the interaction between the GOI and the GoTN, all suggest that the issue has returned to center stage in Tamil Nadu politics.

BACKGROUND: THE BIG CHANGE SINCE 1991

3. (SBU) Although the Sri Lankan Tamil issue remains sensitive in Tamil Nadu and all political parties approach it cautiously, the state's major parties seem to be now more or less in sync with the Government of India on the issue. Post's political sources point out that the situation is drastically different from what it was in the 1980's when the two major Dravidian parties, the DMK and the AIADMK, vied with each other in supporting Sri Lankan Tamil militant groups. Since the Rajiv Gandhi assassination in 1991, the AIADMK party under Jayalalithaa has always remained strident in its anti-LTTE stance. No longer bound to compete with the AIADMK on the issue and sensing the change in popular mood toward the LTTE, the DMK also dismounted the tiger shortly thereafter. The DMK's bitter experience of its 1990 dismissal from power for their controversial support of the LTTE also may have played a role in their decision, according to our contacts.

MEETING WITH KARUNANIDHI REVEALS HIS CAUTION

¶4. (SBU) Our July 3 meeting with DMK Chief Minister Karunanidhi revealed Karunanidhi's cautious approach to the Tamil issue. Karunanidhi told us that his government has adopted a balanced approach, taking into account both India's security requirements and humanitarian concerns for Sri Lankan Tamils. He expressed his personal concern for the "innocent Tamils" of Sri Lanka caught in the conflict. When asked what he would like the Government of India to do to solve the problem, Karunanidhi replied that it was up to the Union Government to decide. Tamil Nadu's role, he said, is limited to providing assistance to the refugees. On questions about a possible role for the international community, Karunanidhi was again content to defer to the Government of India.

SMALLER PARTIES VOCAL IN SUPPORT, BUT KNOW THEIR LIMITS

¶5. (SBU) With the major Dravidian parties, the AIADMK and the DMK distancing themselves from the LTTE, only a few smaller parties are left drumming up ideological support for the Tigers. These parties include the MDMK party of Vaiko, the PMK of Ramadoss, the Dalit Panthers of India (DPI and known as "Viduthalai Siruthaigal" in Tamil) of Thirumavalavan, and a few quasi-political organizations such as the Dravida Kazhagam (DK) of K. Veeramani and the Tamizhar Deseeya Iyakkam (Tamil National Movement) of P. Nedumaran.

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¶6. (SBU) Veeramani told Post on June 16 that the DK's hope and the hope of others of like mind is that the Government of India will stay out of the situation in Sri Lanka. Recognizing that any GOI involvement if it were to occur, would likely be in support of the GOSL, he believes that a hands-off approach is the best he can realistically hope for. He was critical of the U.S. characterization of the LTTE as a terrorist organization and believes that the EU's decision to categorize the LTTE in like manner is due to urging by the U.S. Veeramani wants the U.S. to refrain from providing support to the GoSL military because, he says, such support will be used to engage in a genocidal war against the Tamils.

¶7. (SBU) Even these smaller parties are unwilling to openly confront the GOI by organizing strikes against the ban on LTTE or by urging the GOI to intervene in Sri Lanka on behalf of the Tamils. Two days after meeting with Post, Veeramani joined Chief Minister Karunanidhi and other parties -- including the anti-LTTE Congress party -- in mildly urging the GOI to find a way for lasting peace in Sri Lanka. Talking with Post, Dr. Ramdoss of the PMK took great care to disavow any personal contacts with the LTTE and said his support is limited to the "just cause" of Sri Lankan Tamils. Ramdoss believes an Indian model of federalism should be enough to satisfy the aspirations of the Tamils.

NO EVIDENCE OF MONEY OR ARMS FLOWING TO LTTE

¶8. (SBU) Sri Lanka's new Deputy High Commissioner at Chennai Mr. P.M. Amza recently told us that there is no evidence for ongoing transfer of money or arms from Tamil Nadu to the LTTE. However, smuggling for profit may be taking place. State police officers have in the past told Post that low-key sea-route smuggling of materials such as cycle tires, medicines, or fuel might be going on from the southern Tamil Nadu districts to the LTTE controlled areas in northern Sri

Lanka.

50-60 REFUGEES CONTINUE TO LAND EVERY DAY

¶9. (SBU) Sri Lankan Tamil refugees, meanwhile, are continuing to flow into Tamil Nadu. Since January, 4540 refugees have landed, bringing the official number of refugees in the Tamil Nadu refugee camps to approximately 55,000. According to the Organization for Eelam Refugee Rehabilitation (OfERR) founder-treasurer Chandrahasan, however, the actual number of refugees in the camps is 9,000 more, since not all of those living in the camps are registered on the official rolls. UNHCR Repatriation officer Vadeja Bharati informed Post that the flow is continuing. "On average, it is 50-60 per day. On some days over a hundred come in," he said. Sri Lankan Deputy High Commissioner Amza believes that the LTTE is pushing the Tamils of the island to flee to Tamil Nadu.

POOR CONDITIONS OF CAMPS, GOTN ALLOTS SOME MONEY

¶10. (SBU) Observing the new wave of refugees, the media has focused on the dilapidated housing at the Mandapam transit camp in Ramanathapuram District of Tamil Nadu, where all refugees are initially lodged. "The civic facilities in the camps are creating nightmares for the residents," reported the New Indian Express on June 6. According to the report, many of the 1,955 houses in the transit camp are unsuitable for living and have no electricity. The report also mentioned that leaking pipes, overflowing septic tanks, and lack of good drinking water have made the refugees vulnerable to diseases. On Chief Minister Karunanidhi's tasking, two state ministers visited the Mandapam camp in June and reported the need to repair houses, toilets, roads and electrical lines. The GoTN sanctioned \$60,000 for the purpose, although it is uncertain whether the amount is sufficient to meet the need.

TAMIL NADU POLICE SCREENING REFUGEES

¶11. (SBU) The Hindu newspaper reported on June 29 that a
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sizeable number of refugees given asylum in Tamil Nadu had undergone "self defense" training by the LTTE before arriving in India. The Director General of Tamil Nadu police has provided assurances that the state police have adequate mechanisms to screen the refugees. Only confirmed refugees are allowed to occupy the open camps at Mandapam. Those whose antecedents are doubtful are quarantined at a separate camp in Mandapam for one month. If any suspects are found to have been trained by militant groups in Sri Lanka or are drop-outs of such a group, they are sent to one of two "Special Camps" at Chengalpattu or Cheyyar. According to the Director General's press release of June 30, 24 Sri Lankan Tamils are lodged in the Special Camp at Chengalpattu of whom six are LTTE drop-outs or agents, three are members of other militant groups, 11 are smugglers and four are involved in criminal cases.

¶12. (SBU) COMMENT: Given the backdrop of the Indian mood change that occurred after Rajiv Gandhi's assassination in 1991, the major Tamil Nadu political parties' expressions of concern for Sri Lankan Tamils are at best lip service. As long as the LTTE is seen to be engaged in provocative and terrorist activities, sympathy for their cause will be subdued. However, if the conflict between the Sri Lankan army and the Tamils were to cause major human rights violations against Tamils, the DMK might force the GOI to pressure the GoSL to use restraint.

¶13. (SBU) One characteristic feature of the small Tamil parties that support the LTTE is their leaders' strategy to raid the low-class and low-caste mass base of the Dravidian parties. The Dravidian movement used Tamil linguistic chauvinism in the 60's to mobilize support from lower class and castes, who are seen as being easily swayed by emotion. The pro-LTTE party leaders hoped, and may still be hoping, to recreate such mobilization using pan-Tamil sentiments. Dr. Ramdoss of the PMK (essentially a party of the most backward Vanniar caste), Thirumavalavan of DPI (a party of Dalits), Veeramani (representing the pure Dravidian movement), and Vaiko (aiming for a "renaissance" of authentic Dravidianism), all belong to this category. On the other side, opinion leaders sharply opposed to the pro-LTTE parties are those with a more national outlook, and many of them are Brahmin by caste. Jayalalithaa (AIADMK chief), N. Ram (Editor, The Hindu), Cho Ramaswamy (Editor Thuglak), and Subrahmanian Swamy (Janata Party) all belong to this group. The DMK position on Sri Lanka reflects what the party, now an ally of the Congress and a major player on the national scene, seems to have learned from its own success and the relatively poor showing of the smaller pro-LTTE parties in recent state elections - the LTTE has little popular support in Tamil Nadu. END COMMENT

HOPPER